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Russell Urges New Look At Viet, Congo

By Thomas B. Ross

Sun-Times Bureau

WASHINGTON—Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) complained Wednesday about U.S. involvement in Viet Nam and warned against a repetition of the "tragedy" in the Congo.

Coming from possibly the most influential figure in the senate, Russell's comment foreshadowed a potential softening of congressional support for administration policy toward Asia and Africa.

It also raised serious questions about whether key congressional committees have been fully informed in the last decade about secret U.S. maneuvering on the international scene.

"I thought we made a terrible mistake getting involved in Viet Nam," Russell told newsmen. "I don't know just how we can get out now, but the time is about at hand when we must re-evaluate our position."

On Africa, the senator said it would be "nothing less than a tragedy" and "a monument to poor statesmanship" if the United States gets involved in

the Congo as it has in Viet Nam.

Problem For Others

"If there is any place in the world we haven't any business," he added, "it's The Congo. A half-dozen countries in Europe have a greater stake in the Congo and a greater historical association there than we do."

"If we let them dump this on us, we have lost all pretense of statesmanship."

Russell complained that there are "some people" in the government "who apparently are anxious to get us involved everywhere."

He did not elaborate on what "people" he was referring to.

In Viet Nam, the United States first became involved on a broad scale in the mid-1950s through the secret activities of both the Central Intelligence Agency and the armed services.

OK Assumed

In The Congo, it was revealed last summer that American and Cuban exile pilots, recruited by the CIA, were flying combat missions for the central government.

As chairman of the Armed Services Committee and the supersecret CIA subcommittee, it had been assumed that Russell had been apprised of these operations and had approved of them.

But his remarks Wednesday suggested that he had not been fully informed and that if he had, he might not have gone along with the initial involvement.

Russell promised a full examination of the situation by the Armed Services Committee, but indicated he saw no easy solution, particularly for the Vietnamese problem, at this late date.

It was learned that Russell and President Johnson have conferred privately about the problem on several recent occasions and that the senator conceded he could offer no alternative to current administration policy.

Averse To Bombing

Russell made it clear Wednesday that he was not "impressed by proposals to bomb these jungle trails" leading from Communist North Viet Nam to the guerrillas in South Viet Nam.

In his private talks with Mr. Johnson, Russell reportedly expressed fear that such bombing missions would suck the United States into a war with Communist China.

In calling for a re-evaluation of the U.S. position, Russell said: "We cannot support the present regime in Saigon unless they are able to attract popular support out in the rice paddies and the villages."

The senator noted that the Vietnamese war has been "very expensive in both manpower and equipment." He said it was time to "decide whether there is any possibility of saving those who are a little bit indifferent to their own salvation."